

# Minutes

Housing Committee  
Monday, July 23, 2007

6:30 p.m.

Police Training Room, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Municipal Building, Jamestown, New York

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairperson Stephen Szwejbka, Anthony Dolce, Lillian Ney

MEMBERS ABSENT: Michael Taylor

OTHERS PRESENT: Director of Financial Services/City Clerk James N. Olson,  
Steve Centi and Bruce Anderson

Chairman Szwejbka called the meeting to order.

The minutes from the June, 2007 meeting were approved.

## **REMARKS FROM THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Dr. Ney: I wanted to just point out that in the Fall of the year CHRIC has organized a group/team going from Jamestown to something called Neighbor Works of America. It's sort of a symposium and educational experience to train members of the community to do work and advocacy in their community. I know Len Faulk is planning on going and I'm going...

Dr. Ney: Yes. He really wanted to get some continuity here regarding Neighborhood Revitalization, etc. and you not only learn skills but they have a lot of very excellent workshops on advocacy and what successful cities are doing. Do you know who else is going?

Mr. Centi: I think some people from the PRIDE area.

Dr. Ney: Bob Doverspike is going – he told me after the last Strategic Planning Commission meeting, now that you mention it. So there's three that we know of. I think we should be getting some very good information to bring back.

Dr. Ney: It's called Neighbor Works – it's at the end of October, 27<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup>, something like that.

Mr. Szwejbka: It's during the week though?

Dr. Ney: No, I think it's Friday, Saturday and Sunday at noon.

Mr. Centi: On the same note, four of our staff members are going to Pittsburgh September 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> – it's actually a conference sponsored by Smart Growth America in regard to vacant and abandoned housing issues. They have two days worth of break-out sessions where you can pick and choose what you'd like to deal with. A lot of them deal with many of the issues we're facing today with vacant houses. Two of the Housing Inspectors, Amanda Bleck and myself are all going out. In fact, we registered today.

Dr. Ney: Excellent.

Mr. Szwejbka: Are there any Federal monies on the horizon possibly? All the cities are complaining about vacant houses...

Mr. Centi: None that I'm aware of, although the sources that we have right now which fortunately last year stayed stable, but there's no guarantee that they will continue to be stable...

Mr. Szwejbka: Especially in New York State, doesn't seem to matter where you go, you pick up the newspaper – that's the issue.

Mr. Centi: They have some case studies they're doing in Cleveland that they're going to present in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, in fact you can take a tour of the Pittsburgh neighborhood that's been revitalized - we did that when we went to Utica. They're doing some things in Utica that are kind of interesting.

Dr. Ney: If you go to a National Foundation, like the National Council on Foundations, etc., they have the same break-out things on neighborhoods and revitalization. In fact, one of the people from Jamestown from the Sheldon Foundation who went brought back the brochure regarding neighborhoods. Here we were already plugged into it. I think everybody's working in the cities towards the same end and that helps.

Mr. Centi: I notice one of the break-out sessions dealt with philanthropy and how they get involved in revitalizing neighborhoods. I mean it's an interesting concept.

Dr. Ney: Very much so. I think targeted neighborhood revitalization like people are doing in the Neighborhood Pride lends itself to grants because foundations feel that you can evaluate a small area...what is that neighborhood – 6 blocks, 3 blocks?

Mr. Dolce: 3 by whatever, I don't know exactly what's...

Dr. Ney: But I mean you can see changes in a shorter period of time...

Mr. Szwejbka: It'd be nice if we could generate some interest in other parts of the City.

Mr. Centi: I got a call from Bob Doverspike the other day, just to give me a heads up – that someone had called him complaining about the money that was being focused toward their neighborhood and not this individual's neighborhood and he said... this was his comment to me..."I'm really starting to regret my loss of anonymity – I'm starting to gain more respect for people who work in public service."

Mr. Dolce: I wonder who that person is because I have a feeling I know.

Mr. Centi: I could tell you after.

Mr. Dolce: Well I had the same conversation with an individual who was very upset that one area seems to get all that. They said they have done a lot of work and they ...

Mr. Szwejbka: ...took it up themselves...

Mr. Dolce: ...took it upon themselves and they formed this group and they've done things and they picked up the ball and were running with it...

Dr. Ney: They even had their own fundraisers – that was the first money they ever got was from their chocolate and champagne board, whatever it was, that they had at the Sheldon House. I didn't go but I heard about it.

Mr. Szwejbka: It was good.

Mr. Centi: I think the same people need to understand, right now there's some money that's been focused there from a lot of different areas, but concurrently, the City-wide programs are still up and operating. We still have other targeted area programs that are still having projects going on. So it's not that we're taking everybody else's money that's out there waiting and throwing it in one area – it's just we've been able to find some money to refocus there in order to get some impact. There's been some decent impact in the short term, but everything else is still a go.

Mr. Szwejbka: We have nothing listed under "Old Business," so I just want to continue. I just want to ask, before you get into your discussion, Second and Cross – that area's looking great. What can we do as a committee to try to get more of that throughout the City - developments like that area?

Mr. Centi: Well, it's important to kind of understand that how that development was driven. That development...we leveraged money, the small amount that we put in there leveraged quite a bit more. \$100,000 - it leveraged what – close to \$6,000,000, I think, in new development and their second phase gets approved, which no one's heard on the second application. But what it's done is, you have the State involved, you've got a private partnership, you have investors that really drive the project through low income housing tax credits, and I think it's a model that's worked before. You know, there's somebody in CODE who's experienced in doing that, and, like I say, we played a small role in it and really we weren't the ones that were driving the process.

Mr. Szwejbka: Can we do anything to encourage – because I know I went down on Barrows, I went on Willard and I walked around and I said "Oh my gosh, there's so many areas there that if we could get these buildings down and do what they're doing on 2<sup>nd</sup> and Cross, wow – what a difference we could make in that neighborhood."

Mr. Centi: I mean, the State obviously has to be on board with it and the developer has to be on board with it. It's driven by the developer primarily and you know, we've had discussions with them about other areas in the City to take a look at...

Dr. Ney: I was just going to say, the one thing that we have to do as elected officials, is be responsive when they come to us. Because if you recall, at least a year before they got the funding for that, I remember writing a letter of support from the City Council, then you had to write a letter of support from the Department of Development and then it was a whole year before...then it came again and we had to... they never got the money in the beginning and we had to reiterate our support, so we have to be receptive. The other piece that everybody reminded us of for long term viability as a City, is we have to have mixed housing. We have to have the subsidized, but yet we have to have full rent in terms of taxation for the money back to the City and things like that so...you can explain it better. It's sort of what you would call mixed residential housing – different kinds of units and different pay scales.

Mr. Centi: See, in this particular case with this project because it's larger units, it was more attractive to the State. If they were going in with smaller subsidized units like we tend to have more of in the downtown area, where there are like 450-600 sq. ft., these were multiple bedroom, more family sized units and the State was more agreeable to that type because that was a mix that wasn't being served in the marketplace. Even if you look in the private sector, one and two bedroom apartments are more difficult to rent than a three bedroom. I had a three bedroom – I got 18 calls in one morning, on a Saturday morning from people interested in it. People would say "gee, nobody wants to rent the apartments around here...", I wondered who they were dealing with, but it's more difficult with the one and two bedroom smaller units.

Mr. Szwejbka: Just that there are things like some of those houses that I looked at are dangerous to public safety. They're hazards – they should be taken down, but we don't have the money to take them down...

Mr. Centi: Not all of them.

Mr. Szwejbka: Not all of them...

Dr. Ney: Well his Department can tell you what they get in to in terms of fire, vandals and windows broken – weren't you telling me about something recently that happened?

Mr. Anderson: Oh, on Livingston?

Dr. Ney: You were just dealing with this very thing that we're talking about now. Am I right?

Mr. Anderson: Oh yes – just two today, you know, houses that absentee landlords...they're just letting these houses go...

Mr. Szwejbka: They have to be dangerous because you stand out in front of some, you can physically see they're tipping to one side – they're lifting, or their porches are deteriorated, the roofs are caving in...

Mr. Anderson: It's really not that bad from the outside – it's broken windows, that's what got our attention...working with Greg Moran and these guys upstairs – it's just a constant, constant battle. I'm finding that out. I've only been in this position since February and holy smokes – what an eye opener.

Mr. Szwejbka: I just want to make sure we as the Housing Committee are doing everything that we can do to encourage more development – I'm new at this – this is only my second year in Housing, but it seems like we're spinning our wheels a lot. I think we're improving since I came on; I've lived in Jamestown for twenty some years now and I think it's improving. The last few years seem to be changing. There's a lot of changes for the better. I just want to make sure we keep going in that direction.

Mr. Centi: It's that issue – the amount of need out there and the amount of resources to be able to address those. We all know kind of what we'd like to do – just don't have the financial capacity to do it or even the physical capacity to keep up with it – but that's why in these cases when you're dealing with not-for-profits that have come in, the Neighbor Works things with CHRIC, you know we're going to have probably at least two not-for-profits in that PRIDE area that are going to do projects that we're going to assist with. You know, we'll have CHRIC, we'll have COI, so that's the only way we can

really get things done is through collaboration and leveraging our money to produce a greater bang for the buck, I guess.

Mr. Szwejbka: Well, I rattled on enough, go ahead and do...

Dr. Ney: Well this is important stuff.

### **GRASS CUTTING**

Mr. Centi: As I mentioned to you about the grass thing – we have a procedure in place. We just kind of wanted to give you an update on it, let you know that from our vantage point it's important to keep funding the parks employee???? – I know that's part of the budget that you're going to be dealing with, but that \$4,000.00, I think that's in there for that individual, goes a long way for us to be able to stay on top of things because you know, we keep him busy with a list of properties that he can address, that we can't deal with because we really don't have anybody...

Mr. Szwejbka: Is that through Jeff Lehman's department?

Mr. Centi: Right. It's a Parks summer position. He really does nothing but mow either city properties – I mean we actually had him up at Country View too because we had to get that knocked down up there and make it more attractive and more marketable and he did that. So it's important to keep him on line because...

Mr. Dolce: Is there one person that goes around and does all these?

Mr. Centi: Just one person.

Mr. Dolce: Do they get to go back at all?

Mr. Centi: Yes. He does it multiple times. He's on a schedule – we give him a list of properties that we...see it's complaint driven obviously from our Department so there may be some if you'll drive by and say the grass is high, but if we haven't received a complaint on it – generally people will complain about grass and you know, I've instructed the guys that if they're driving around and they notice something that's really out of the ordinary, we'll put it on the list and get it taken care of. We have a procedure in place working with the finance department to bill back, and we're doing that.

Dr. Ney: I called about a few too and people have called me and they take care of them right away. Wonderful.

Mr. Szwejbka: And he does come back on a regular basis because there's a couple in my neighborhood.

### **PROGRESSIVE FINES**

Mr. Centi: I also wanted to give you a couple other updates. There's a follow up to the Judge's meeting here when he came to visit. Marilyn's working on some language about progressive fines and we're going to be bringing that back through this Committee. There was a cap on fines that was built into the Charter. I believe what we're going to ask is that discretion would be at the Judge's to eliminate the cap on there and that for each...it's going to start at \$125 and go to \$250.00 and go to \$500.00 – these are repeat offenses within a limited time frame. So, Marilyn's looking at

language that's been adopted elsewhere and the Mayor's on board with it so we're proceeding.

Dr. Ney: When can we expect that because that was mentioned to us a month or so ago that Marilyn was working on that.

Mr. Centi: She's down in Florida right now.

Mr. Olson: She's coming to the next Public Safety Committee meeting.

Mr. Centi: It'll be there to vote on for the next voting session.

Dr. Ney: Good.

Mr. Centi: So I just wanted to let you know that that's progressed from...and the Judge has been on board with it even though the Judge is very particular about making sure that people have received proper service and we don't get any notices to proceed unless he's sure that...

Dr. Ney: ...and due process has happened...

#### **EVANS BUILDING – WINSOR STREET**

Mr. Centi: The other thing I wanted to bring up to speed about was the Evans building. If you recall, that's been kind of lingering out there – it went through an issue with the...

Dr. Ney: Is this the fire building?

Mr. Centi: Yes, the one on Winsor and Harrison. After the owner passed away, there were issues with the probate and ownership issues, and as things were transferring then it got into the early part of the year when the owners actually dropped their attorney who was representing them and actually had an auctioneer come in who is now their representative who wanted to hold that auction to auction off the contents of the building. We said fine, go ahead and do it – we're not going to hold up the auction. Next thing we heard was they didn't get the advertisement submitted in a timely manner so they had to delay the auction another three weeks. They held the auction, and then all of a sudden, they said we need a couple more weeks to get the materials out now, that we've sold to people so then...

Dr. Ney: I don't think that's right.

Mr. Centi: None of it was right. This lingered...this has been in Court for months now, and what happened was as we were losing patience with it, the Judge was losing patience with it, they went and got a new attorney now, so now the auctioneer was no longer representing the family, not directly, they had an attorney who was now the caveman attorney who said "I'm new to this. I don't really understand the case and I need some time to get up to speed." So he was given a little bit of time, and in the meantime, we put more and more pressure on the Judge until they finally met last week. The asbestos abatement contractor was there today. They already took down the portions of the building starting last Friday outside of what they already did in terms of pulling some of that down. Our concern was that the material was still falling onto that sidewalk, even though the sidewalk had a snow fence. People still felt compelled to

walk on that side of the street. I saw people tight roping the curb to stay on that side as opposed to crossing the street and walking on the other side.

Mr. Dolce: Well, it's a busy street, the school is right up around the corner and...

Mr. Centi: In other words, the asbestos guy is there today. He promised a 48 hour turn-around with the survey, then they'll move through mediation. The demolition contractor now has confirmed that he's on board to do it and they're going to do it at their expense. So, the alternative was that we went in and paid for everything – fronted the money and then went back to try to recover it. This way, they're going to...if they don't, then we're just going to go ahead; we've already engaged a demolition contractor.

Mr. Szwejbka: What about liability if someone does get hurt going by there? I mean that's what I'm concerned about.

Mr. Centi: Well, the liability – this is the point that we drove home to every representative that represented the property owner was...

Mr. Dolce: It's their responsibility...

Mr. Centi: ...and there was a situation where – maybe from a structural standpoint, the building wasn't actually going to collapse any further than it did. But, they had no ability to keep people out of that building. And it's an unoccupied hazard. We did issue an emergency declaration...

Dr. Ney: I think we should give them a timeline.

Mr. Centi: Well, there is no time now. Time is up and has been up. They met with the Judge a week ago Friday and then the Judge rescheduled them for this past Wednesday which he went to and now...

Dr. Ney: So he's really keeping that up...

Mr. Centi: He just told them "time is up." He won't take anymore excuses and he wanted the contractor's confirmation that he was on board with it because actually the demolition contractor that they had lined up, wouldn't even return any calls to our office when we were trying to find out what the time frame was that he was going to be on the job. Then they heard that he was off the job; now he's back on again, so now they're doing it. Larry's right on top of this right now. He's at the point now where he's...I think when they finally get it down he'll be off for a couple of days because he'll be celebrating so much.

Dr. Ney: Unbelievable what you have to go through to get things done. Torture.

Mr. Centi: Well, I think the BPU has an option to purchase the property. In fact, they extended the option I believe for another six months.

Mr. Dolce: At least they'll get it cleaned up.

Mr. Centi: There'll be a structure still left on there. There's a block structure that was unaffected by the fire that's independent from the other. So that's going to stay

there; in fact, I think, based upon what the Board of Public Utilities does in the future, that might serve their purposes in the short term to leave it there. The site will be cleared, it'll be graded, it'll be seeded and then getting the building down is the big part of it. But that's proceeding and that'll be taken care of....

Mr. Szwejbka: What else was back there? What were all those trucks?

Mr. Centi: Those all went in the auction. All that stuff there – they had the trucks back there, they were filled with stuff too. So they sold the contents, they sold the trucks...

Mr. Szwejbka: It was like a junk yard.

Dr. Ney: Really.

Mr. Centi: Yes, unfortunately that was kind of the nature of the way the property had been used. Even inside the building there was stacks and pallets of materials that weren't damaged in the fire.

Mr. Szwejbka: That's a positive note. Sounds like it's moving along.

Dr. Ney: When was the fire – what was the date, I don't remember?

Mr. Centi: September of '06.

Mr. Dolce: Yes, - we had just left that meeting...

Dr. Ney: That's right – and they got a call.

Mr. Centi: See, under normal circumstances...first of all there was no insurance on the building. So where we would lien the insurance policy for demolition costs and get the building knocked down, there was no opportunity to do that. Then, have the owner passing away, which all of a sudden threw another monkey wrench in the thing...then you had this constant roll-over/change over of people who were representing the family...

Mr. Szwejbka: It seems problematic – a big building like that with no insurance. It seems that somehow they would be required to have insurance.

Dr. Ney: Yes, really.

Mr. Szwejbka: ...a loophole somehow...Well, thank you. Anything else?

## **BUSH STREET**

Dr. Ney: Well, I mentioned at some other meetings, Steve, and I don't remember what it was, Public Safety Committee thanking the Department of Development for assisting in the Bush Street issues that we had been dealing with for quite some time, but sort of intensified recently and we had a lot of help from Todd and others in your department. So I wanted to thank you for that.

Mr. Szwejbka: Well, very quickly on that, maybe you could tell us what's going on behind 103 Bush Street in that area where the dog problems were. Because I haven't received any calls for a couple of weeks now.

Dr. Ney: Right – that's the place I'm talking about.

Mr. Centi: To be honest with you, I'd have to check into that and get back to you on that.

Dr. Ney: But Todd actually went there and spent...because there were too many and the Chief was there – there were too many dogs. You're only allowed three – there were five there the Chief said.

Mr. Szwejbka: No, I'm saying they must have done something correct because I haven't heard anything. The complaints have stopped completely. I was inundated.

Mr. Centi: The Chief mentioned at the Department Heads' meeting about this Impact Plan. I think the City's portion is like \$139,000 and he said that they're actually doing increased patrols that they wouldn't have been able to do – more quality of life issues in the Bush/Bowen area where there have been a lot of complaints where I think there's three different times during the day there's actually officers on foot that are going through the neighborhoods. So now when you have the noise issues, you've got the dog issue – they're right there. And he says that's really one of the most difficult things to deal with is you know there's a problem somewhere, but when you only have the capacity to have someone spend like a half hour out of the day – they make a pass through a particular area – it really doesn't have the impact.

Dr. Ney: Yes, and then when the police go and they answer a complaint, they get there and nobody's making noise then.

Mr. Dolce: ...because they all have a scanner...

Mr. Szwejbka: When your guys are out on the street, would it be advantageous to have them to be able to go to the sub-station – do paperwork there if possible? Because I talked to Rex about having others using them and he said anybody that wants to use it – it's fine with him...

Mr. Centi: I could ask them about it because they could hook up their...if they wanted to go there as a drop off area because that software program, we had that capital request that we had made last year, it was kind of a three year request because the costs were going to be spread out over three years. We just submitted all of our forms that we had in house; so there's two issues – one is that all the forms had to be in for building permits and planning and all the Code Enforcement forms that they could enter now into the system. I mean, we've already paid them for this first year, so it included the first year's cost for the software and there's an annual maintenance fee that's charged on it. So that's moving forward, but there's an issue with the capacity of the computer downstairs and they're going to upgrade the capacity and we have to have that happen before they can actually come here and put the system on the AS400 and allow us to...

Dr. Ney: Yes, that came up in another report that I read recently from Bob Johnston that he sent us on the Persell – is that the name of the school? Do we know when that capacity could be fixed?

Mr. Olson: No – I can ask and find out. Joe and Dan regarding that...I'll ask them.

Mr. Szwejbka: It would be ideal to even have a representative from the Fire Department there.

Mr. Szwejbka: ...their presence – there's coffee there, there's a table to work at, it should be more than just a place...it could be used for other things. I think if Rex is going to be open to it...

Mr. Centi: He also mentioned today about somebody who's...how many 911 calls have been made from the callbox at Lillian Dickson Park? Where people are just running, and they might just be running across the street pressing the button and heading back over, so he was talking about the need to probably look at getting cameras, with vandalism going on ...this is where you have limited capacity to deal with it when you only have somebody that might make a pass through there...

Mr. Szwejbka: About a year ago, there was a grant out there...

Dr. Ney: Yes, I know I remember.

Mr. Szwejbka: ...cameras, obviously the reason you're getting them is for homeland security, but they can be used for a lot of other things.

Mr. Centi: ...if you can tap into some of that money...first you've got to get the state to release their homeland security dollars, and then you have to get the federal government to release it into the state...

Mr. Szwejbka: It makes it difficult, but I'm not sure how much is still left, but it was out there because I was doing a little research on it.

Mr. Centi: Well, they were talking about American cities now that are going to – like Philadelphia and some of the bigger cities – they're starting to put the cameras in like they have in London. But they were talking about putting in about 30,000 cameras or something...sounds like a lot, but in London they have like 300,000 cameras...

Mr. Szwejbka: They're everywhere.

Dr. Ney: Well, there's about 7, 8, 9,000,000 people there, aren't there? It's one of the biggest cities...

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

James N. Olson  
Director of Financial Services/City Clerk